

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences 5 (2010) 1884–1889

---

---

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

---

---

WCPCG-2010

# Investigating different aspects of identity among the students of Tehran Universities: the role of sex differences

Rogayeh Mousavi<sup>a,\*</sup>, Rasol Roshan<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup>*Shahed University, first of Tehran-Qom express way, Tehran-3319118351-Iran*

Received January 4, 2010; revised February 21, 2010; accepted March 9, 2010

---

## Abstract

The aim of the present study was to investigate different aspects of identity among the students of Tehran universities with a focus on the role of sex differences. The statistical universe included all the students who were studying at Tehran universities. The samples included 1004 cases that were selected by stratified random sampling. Religious and national identity scale and the revised identity style questionnaire were the devices used in this study. Multiple-variance analysis of variance was applied for the purpose of data analysis. The results of the study indicated that: regarding the three sub-scales of information, normative and commitment identity style, the female group had (got) higher means compared to the male group. This is while the male group showed a higher mean in the sub-scale of diffuse/avoidance; the female group showed a higher mean in all the sub-scales of national and religious identity. On the whole, the present study revealed that all the sub-scales of religiosity, psychological well-being, information, normative and commitment identity, religious and national identity are higher in the female students compared to the male students, whereas the diffuse and avoidance identity was higher in the male students. In general, these findings prove psychological and social disorientation among the male students in comparison to the female group. Since the male population (community) of the society is considered as more active and dynamic, this issue needs the serious consideration of those in charge.

*Key words:* psychological identity, national identity, religious identity, student

---

## 1- Introduction

Erickson (1968) has defined the feeling of identity as follows: Dynamic organization of incentives, abilities, believes and history in the form of an integrated and independent “self” that guides the developing route of one’s life.

The first time, Freud made use of the term “identity”. In that time, Freud tried to talk about an inner identity for formulating an implicit concept among Jews that emphasized race and religion and concentrated on preparation for other life than the present life which was empty of prejudice and was completely logical. Identity theorists can be considered as a group of “Ego” psychological theorists whose common characteristic was emphasis on the effect of

---

\*Mousavi@shahed.ac.ir

some aspects of social and psychological environment of “Ego” and its development and performance. In this regard, we can refer to the theories of Erickson, Glasser, Kegan, Blos, Lovenger, Kolberg, Morcia, Adams, and Berzonsky (Ghesami, 2005).

According to Adams’ theory (1998), common applications of different dimensions of identity include: a) presentation of a mental structure through which one can find who he/she is; b) gives meaning to one’s life through commitments, values, and aims; c) provides a feeling of self control and free will; d) tries to create stability, integration, and consistency between values, believes, and commitments; etc) creates the ability to recognize potential capacities through the feeling of understanding future possibilities and probable choices.

Erickson argues that understanding identity itself needs a psychological-social interaction. In other words, the adolescent should create consistency between her/his self image and the image she/he thinks other people have of her/him. The adolescents and adults who have a strong feeling of identity consider themselves as separate and distinct individuals (Mussen, 2001). Erickson (1983, cited in Montgomery, 2005) argues that the experiences of this level of personal development can directly affect the rest of adulthood life.

Finding identity, its various dimensions, and its formation is interesting for psychologists and because of its role in the quality of individuals’ lives has resulted in many studies (Erickson, 1968; Marcia, 1983; Shahraray, 2005; Berzonsky, 2003).

One of the subjects appealing for the personality and development psychologists is the development process of identity finding and factors affecting it. According to the theoretical foundations of identity and findings of researches in the field, family factors, social-cultural factors, and personal differences are among those factors affecting identity finding processes. Among these, the role of sexual differences in the development of identity is among the subjects resulting in various theories both from the theoretical and research aspects.

Erickson argues that development of identity can be completely different among women and men. He suggests that physical differences can affect some aspects of developing identity and what comprises of a successful identity (Buckler, 2005). In the studies of Waterman (1999) researchers have shown no difference in some identity subjects, especially in the attitude toward pre-marriage sexual relationship; but generally both women and men follow similar identity formation patterns at high school and university ages.

Marcia (1966, 1983) presented a specific approach for studying the identity status in adolescents based on the identity concept of Erickson. The categorization of Marcia reveals how adolescents investigate and discover identity related issues and what commitments they gain about specific values, roles, and social relations. At the first glance, it seems that the need for identity finding is the same among girls and boys but the studies of Archer (1985) have shown that the process and possibly the results of identity finding are different for girls and boys. For example, while girls and boys are the same at making decisions about job, job expectations, girls tend to pay more attention to creating balance between their own needs and those of others, especially those of their future family. Though girls and boys start the duty of identity formation in adolescence, but different cultural necessities makes them to solve identity related subjects at different times. At least for some women, the identity related changes continues in adulthood and its possibility increases in the “transition” period (leaving of home by children, divorce). Researches conducted in 1980s suggested that the idea of “identity” is different for women and men.

Although identity related focus points are mainly about “the individual’s sense of self” that are evident in the choices about job and values, some researchers such as Josselson(1982) have found that women have a different understanding about identity in which the “individual’s sense of self” is about relations with others. In other words, the individual’s concept of self identity has a direct relationship with her relations with others. Social differences are related to differences in expectations that are learnt through different attitudes toward girls and boys from the time of birth (Huston, 1983). The sex-related expectations normally increase in adolescence because parents and friends believe that by approaching the adulthood period, they follow suitable sexual roles more than before. Expectations from boys and girls are different. Boys are expected to have characteristics such as self-expressing, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, dominance, rationality in problem solving and decision making, and defending personal believes. On the other hand, girls are expected to show more sensitivity toward others, be more affectionate in self-expressing, and use intuition rather than rationality in problem solving and take the educating role in their relationship with others.

Josselson(1982) believe that psychological tasks of girls and boys are different in adolescence. In their view, the main difference is related to development activities and tasks related to the concept of independence, autonomy, and

separation. In their opinion, masculine sexual roles traditionally focus on independence and autonomy; while on the women's behalf, they are more focused on caring about others, intimacy, and interdependence (Shahraray, 2005).

Since sexuality is realized, interpreted, and evaluated differently in various cultures, the present research aims to study sexual differences in various aspects of identity in Iranian culture.

### Method

The population of this study includes all the present students of universities of Tehran in the 2007-2008 academic years. The participants are 1004 students selected by stratified random sampling method from Tehran universities – Allameh Tabatabaee (11.40%), Sharif Technical University (10.20%), University of Tehran (11.20%), Science and Technology University (11.40%), Shahed University (11.90%), Amirkabir University (10.70%), Tarbiat Moallem University (8.20%), Khajeh Nasiroddin-e-Tousi University (11.40%), Shahid Beheshti University (12%).

### Instruments

a) **Religious and National Identity Scale:** This scale has 22 items and measures religious, moral and national identity. The religious and moral identity has two subscales of strict and inconsiderate religious identity. National identity also includes subscales of patriotism, and the identity of defending the land. Lotfabadi and Norouzi (2005) have reported that this scale has suitable psychometric properties (validity, reliability and internal consistency of subscales), and calculated Cronbach Alpha Coefficient for subscales are between 0.73 and 0.88.

b) **The Identity Style Inventory:** This Inventory has 40 items and four subscales titled as Information Identity Style, Normative Identity Style, Diffuse/ avoidant Identity Style, and Commitment. Berzonsky (1992) has reported the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of 0/62 for information subscale, 0/66 for normative subscale, and 0.73 for avoidance subscale. Ghazanfari (2004) has also confirmed validity and reliability of this instrument and had standardized it in Iranian society.

### Findings

Demographic findings reveal that the mean age of the participants is 21.65 with the standard deviation of 2.13 in the range of 19-45 years old.

Comparison of the male and female student groups in the Subscales of the Psychological Identity Style

Table 1. Summary of Descriptive Findings in Psychological Identity Style Subscales in male and female student Groups

Variable	Group	M	SD
Information Style	male	36.88	7.66
	female	38.83	6.74
Normative Style	male	28.31	5.67
	female	29.89	5.82
Diffuse/Avoidance Style	male	27.99	6.32
	female	26.86	6.78
Commitment	male	31.10	5.57
	female	31.86	5.16

The findings presented in Table 1 shows that in all subscales of psychological identity style the female group has differences with the males group.

In general, the results of comparison of the two male and female groups in the subscales and the general score revealed that the identity style profiles of groups are significantly different ( $W = 0/96$ ,  $F = 11/08$ ,  $df1 = 4$ ,  $df2 = 996$ ,  $p = 0/0005$ ). Also analysis showed that means of all subscales are different between these two groups (Table 3).

Table 3. Test of between subject effects of subscales of Psychological Identity Style between male and female groups

Variable	Type III SS	Df	MS	F	P value
Information Style	952.19	1	952.19	18.28	0.0005
Normative Style	630.61	1	630.61	19.11	0.0005
Diffuse Style	317.94	1	317.94	7.41	0.0005
Avoidance Style	144.99	1	144.99	4.92	0.03

The female group has a higher mean in three subscales of information, normative and commitment styles in comparison to the male group. While the male group has higher means in the subscale of diffuse/avoidance (see table 1). Thus, we can indicate that the female group has a better status in the psychological identity styles in comparison to the male group.

Table 4. Summary of Descriptive Findings in Psychological Identity Style Subscales in male and female Groups

Variable	Group	M	SD
Strict Religious Identity	male	29.30	10.25
	female	31.12	7.93
Inconsiderate Religious Identity	male	15.64	4.74
	female	16.82	4.02
Patriotic Identity	male	25.84	6.04
	female	28.34	4.79
Defense of the Land Identity	male	18.70	4.61
	female	20.82	3.71

The findings presented in Table 4 showed that in all subscales of religious and national identity the mean of subscales of the male group is lower than that of the female group.

In general, the results of comparison of the two male and female groups in subscales and general score revealed that the profiles of groups are significantly different  $W= 0/94$ ,  $F= 17/30$ ,  $df1= 4$ ,  $df2= 996$ ,  $p= 0/0005$ ). Also analysis showed that means of all subscales are different between these two groups (Table 5).

Table 5. Test of between subject effects of Subscales of Religious and Natural Identity Style of male and female groups

Variable	Type III SS	Df	MS	F	P value
Strict Religious Identity	920.34	1	920.34	10.96	0.001
Inconsiderate Religious Identity	351.56	1	351.56	18.23	0.0005
Patriotic Identity	157.52	1	157.52	52.65	0.0005
Defense of the Land Identity	1127.04	1	1127.04	64.36	0.0005

The female group has a higher mean in all subscales of national and religious identity in comparison to the male group (see table 4). Thus, we can indicate that the female group has a better status in the national and religious identity in comparison to the male group.

### Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that in all subscales of psychological identity, female students are significantly different from male students. These differences are in the form that in these subscales, the female group has higher means. Studies have shown that sexual differences may be effective in some aspects of identity formation and what makes of a successful identity. However, some studies (Waterman, 1999) have shown that men and women follow the same identity formation patterns at high school and university levels.

An overview of past studies in the field reveals that the studies of identity development follow two specific styles in the two sexes. Researchers conducted by Archer (1985) have studied sexual difference in identity development in the framework of traditional theory of Erickson. The findings of two separate studies by Archer carried out on adolescents (young and Middle aged ones) showed that there are no differences in terms of sex between these two groups. In the first study, Archer (1985) realized that women and men experience all identity status in a similar fashion. The second study revealed that the two sexes involved themselves in the identity development process equally; except for the immature identity status that men faced more than women. From the political ideology view, men were more entangled in the immature status and women were more entangled in the diffuse identity status. Considering the family roles, the moratorium and successful status occurred more frequently among women rather than men.

Another study by Rahiminejad and Tashk (2008) revealed that in the belief and interpersonal contexts, males face the immature status more than females, while females face the mature status more than males. Also, from the successful identity in these two contexts, the scores of females and males have been reported close to each other, In

the study of the identity status among female and male students, Omidian (2008) has shown that from the general identity perspective, only the diffuse identity was significantly different between the two sexes; and males got higher scores. In the belief dimension, in no status a significant difference existed, but in the interpersonal relationships, the score of diffuse identity was higher among males. The study of Skohri et al. (2007) showed different information, normative, diffuse and commitment identity styles among female and male students.

Some studies (Miller, 1991; Nadings, 1993; Cited in Streitmatter, 1993) have also emphasized the clarification of sexual differences from the Gilligan viewpoint. The core of Gilligan viewpoint is this belief that women define themselves through relationship with others and through masculine traditional methods. Development of women follows a different direction (a relation-based direction). Thus, different socializing experiences cause men and women to have a different perspective toward world. Action is defined for men from the autonomous viewpoint and for women from the relationship viewpoint.

The comparison of female and male students showed that in all subscales of religion and national identity, female students are significantly different from male students. This difference is so that in these subscales the females has a higher mean. Among the possible reasons of this issue, we can mention the close relationship between being religious and the religious and national identity and we can claim that since all the sub-scales of being religious is higher among female students on comparison to the male students, the national and religious identity of females is also higher than males; but for the lack of research background (at least national background) there is a need for more studies about existence of such a difference.

In sum, the present study revealed that all subscales of being religious, information, normative, and commitment identity and religious and national identity are higher in female students in comparison to the male students, while the diffuse/avoidance identity is more among males. These findings generally confirm the unorganized psychological and social status of male students in comparison to female students. This issue can be attributed to the fact that the resemblance and identity finding procedures in Iranian culture is different for boys and girls, so that adolescent boys challenge the family values more than girls' on the other hand, boys spend a larger period on identity finding. This issue puts them more in the face of identity finding related problems. Since the male part of Iranian society is considered as the more dynamic and active one, this finding appeals serious attention of related authorities.

## References

- Adams, G. R. (1998). *The Objective Measure of Identity Status: a reference manual*. Unpublished Manuscript. Ontario, Canada: University of Guelph.
- Archer, S. L. (1985). Career and/or family: The identity process for adolescent girls. *Youth and Society*, 16(3), 289-314.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (1992). Identity style and Coping Strategies. *Journal of Personality*: 60, 771-788.
- Berzonsky, M. D. (2003). Identity style and well-being: Does commitment matter? *Identity. an International Journal of Theory and Research*: 3(2), 131-142.
- Buckler, Lauren M. (2005). *Gender Differences in Identity and Intimacy Development*. University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.
- Eriksson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York, USA: W.W. Norton.
- Ghazanfari A. (2004). Standardization and Validation Identity Style questionnaire, *Psychology and Educational Studies Journal*, 1, 81-94.
- Ghesami M. (2005). *Investigation of Relationship Family Functions with Identity Styles* (Unpublished MS Thesis). University of Azzahra, Tehran, Iran.
- Huston, A. (1983). Sex typing In E. M. Hetherington (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology: Socialization, Personality and Social Development*. (Vol. 4, pp. 387-487). New York, USA: Wiley.
- Josselson, R. (1982). Personality structure and identity status in women as viewed through early memories. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 11, 293-299.
- Lotfabadi H. & Norouzi V. (2005). Scale making for measuring Adolescents Students Value systems., *Review quarterly journal of Educational Innovations*, 7, 33-58.
- Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3, 551-558.
- Marcia, J. E. (1983). Some directions for investigation of Ego development in early adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 3, 215-223.
- Markus, H.R. & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
- Montgomery, M. J. (2005). Psychological intimacy and identity: From early adolescence to emerging adulthood. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 20(3), 346-374.
- Mussen, P. H., Conger, J. J. & Kagan, J. (2001). *Child Development and Personality* (Fourth ed.). New York, USA: Harper & Row.
- Omidian M. (2008). *Comparing Happiness and Self Finding Regarding to Identity Finding Process in Students Yazd University*. Paper presented at the fourth mental health students conference, p 550.
- Rahiminejad A. & Tashk A. (2008), "Relationship between Religiosity Identity, National and Individuality with Anxiety and self steam", Iranian Identity and young's Congress Procedure, pp 141.

- Shaharay M., (2005), "Teenager Development Psychology: Developmental Approach", Elm Press, Tehran, Iran.
- Shokri O., Shahraray M., Daneshvarpour Z., Dastjerdi R., (2007), " Individual differences in Identity and educational function", quarterly journal of health psychological-tehran-Iran, Vol 1, pp 16-29.
- Streitmatter, J. (1993). Gender differences in identity development: An examination of longitudinal data. *Adolescence*, 28(109), 55-77.
- Waterman, S.A. (1999) Identity as an Aspect of Optimal Psychological Functioning. In : *Adolescent Identity information* (Ed) by Adams G.R Gullotta T.P. and Montema Yor, R-Sage Publication.